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LETTERS TO PROMINENT PERSONS.

No. 6, PART 2D.—TO HON. JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL.

YOUR partisans noticeably do not share the extreme sensibility of him who fell beneath the tower of Thebez. Instead of displaying his virile antipathy to being a woman's trophy, they seem to think that if they can but persuade men to say of one, "A woman slew him," he need not be so very dead after all !

I shall perhaps be considered as lending myself to these humane efforts by adding what may be reckoned a postscript to my previous letter ; but a postscript which you were good enough to furnish and which it would be presumptuous in me to suppress. As if anxious to prove my conclusions not too severe, even before my letter had left the printers' hands, you gave so ample and so luminous a justification of its strictures, that I should be a mere spendthrift of demonstration not to present it as the latest, most characteristic and most impressive of your political achievements.

The Union League Club, of Chicago, designing to inaugurate a revival of patriotism, and to stimulate a true and distinctive Americanism, determined to emphasize the birthday of Washington. To this end they resolved to establish a series of lectures to be delivered on the 22d of February of each year. It was assumed that an occasion so specifically marked, and so carefully prepared for, would be honored by an address, written with the motive of the Club or the central idea of the new movement in mind,—I am giving almost the very language of the Club itself. It was a noble purpose, and the mode of effecting it was nobly planned. The whole movement started on the highest level. Socially, morally, patriotically, it is fraught with promise to our country.

The Club paid you the high honor of inviting you, as long ago as last October, to deliver the opening lecture of this series. You

accepted, and named your subject—"Our Politics." You were invited to make your own terms, and you are reported to have made them five hundred dollars. Your theme and your terms were instantly agreed to. The programmes were prepared, the audience was assembled, and then, instead of delivering the speech which had been promised and paid for, you coolly substituted an altogether different and inapposite dissertation, which no one had demanded and which no one wanted! I do not place this on a level of obligation or honor. On the ordinary plane of financial business, of mercantile traffic, I ask, is this fair dealing? Certainly it is not considered fair dealing at the corner grocery whose introduction into politics you deplore. If the corner grocer should conduct his business in that way, it would not be long before he would find himself lodged in the county jail.

And you had hardly found your tongue before you began to talk of your "conscience," which, you intimated, was so imperious that it would not let you alone, and so superior in delicacy to that of your countrymen that its voice is like the voice of one crying in the wilderness. Beyond doubt the Club will agree that your voice cannot be more appropriately engaged than in crying—crying loud and hard in a genuine and penitent wail, till you are ready to come out of the wilderness into Christian society and behave yourself like an honest corner-grocer, in or out of politics.

What reason did you give for the extraordinary liberty you took? Simply that on arriving in Chicago you found that you were to address a mixed audience, an audience composed of both parties! You professed that you "had been in the habit of speaking your mind pretty strongly, but you felt that here you stood in a very delicate position, where you could not express yourself with entire frankness."

And then you walked into the dining-room, and rising among the little wax Cupids and Venuses and Apollos of boned turkey *en Bellevue* and aspic of *foies gras*, you announced boldly that "what is wanting in our politicians of the present day, more than anything else, is the one element of *courage*. To ME courage is the highest of the virtues, because it is the safeguard of every other virtue!"

And you said it as blandly as if you had not just waved the white feather of retreat more palpably than ever the soldier King of Navarre wore the white plumes of onset.

Every other American sees the grotesqueness of your attitude. Is it possible that you cannot be made to see it? It is so simple that he who runs—and certainly you are he—may read.

You are a man of letters. Learn the *a b c* of courage. You wrote your lecture and carried it to Chicago. When you got there you found so many who did not agree with you that you dared not deliver it, and you rushed to cover in the grave of Shakespeare!

This is all there is of it. You had not the courage of your convictions. You dared not face a disapproving audience. You had been quite resolved to “speak your mind pretty strongly,” so long as you thought your audience were of the same mind; but as soon as you saw opposition, you fancied six Richmonds in the field, and you turned and fled with Richard III. It is idle to talk of the “delicacy of your position.” It was no merely private and social occasion; it was a Club with a thousand members celebrating the birthday of Washington. You were invited to speak on politics. The object, you were fully informed, was to seek higher political education. There was no delicacy in your position, but there was danger,—danger of your audience disagreeing with you, since it was “a mixed audience, an audience composed of both parties.” But that was the very thing you ought, as a man of patriotism and a man of nerve, to have welcomed. That was your opportunity; that is what the politicians whose cowardice you deplore are constantly doing. Every man in Congress, every man in our State Legislatures, every man on the stump, faces “a mixed audience,—an audience composed of both parties.” It is because they face you and combat you, you and your faction, boldly, uncompromisingly, that they have earned your hostility. But you,—you who “place courage above all the other virtues because it is the safeguard of all the others,”—when you found that you could not compliment the English Government as you wished, without offending the Irish who had but lately heard Justin McCarthy, or that the Union League Club of Chicago were not all Mugwumps, as the wrathful Club men variously and rather roughly put it, you threw down your manuscript, left all the other virtues to shift for themselves, and shambled after Richard III. as sorry a sight as the deformed King himself. The part of courage would have been to address the men who were not Mugwumps. What hindered you? You

“threw up your political discourse because you could not make it to your mind.” Who forbade your making it to your mind? No one had control over you, and you had months of notice. It was your own fears that dominated you, and make us conclude that you do not know what cowardice or courage is. You had so little comprehension of the situation that you summoned the prophet Nathan to your assistance; but if Nathan had been of your kind, as soon as he found himself in the King’s presence, and saw that David actually was the man and that David’s eye was on him, he would have quietly smothered his little ewe lamb under his prophet’s robe and delivered to the royal and formidable sinner a rambling dissertation on the question as to whether Moses or Miriam wrote the Song of the Red Sea!

Could the most practical politician of your despised corner grocery display more of childishness than you, when, after your own confession that you had come to Chicago to tell the truth, but, finding that you were likely to meet a good many who did not believe or did not like your truth, you had decided not to tell it; having, that is, run away with your truth from the first men you met, you had the brazen or the infantile assurance to rise up in the evening and say, “The one thing that is more wanting than anything else is people who will tell the truth to the first man they meet, or to any number of men that they meet.”

Do you not see that your position is exactly that of the soldier of our war of the rebellion who declared that his head was “just as good a fighter as Grant’s or Sherman’s, but, damn it! when the fighting begins my legs won’t hold me.”

In the comparatively safe shelter of the banqueting hall, in the centre of a hollow square of Harvard graduates, behind a fortification of smilax and tulips, your courage rose to the valiant pronunciamento that “it is the business of *us educated men*, if we can but unite with anybody else—at any rate to unite with each other—to see if we cannot do something.” You had already shown what you would do if you had to stand alone; you would “stand edgeways;” but, if we can unite with each other, it is the business of *us educated men* “to see if we cannot do something.” You deplored—indirectly, to be sure, and “edgeways”—our lack of great men and our indisposition to send to the front the best we have, and you thought we “*educated men*” should “pay a

little more attention to politics, still more to other people's politics."

Very well. The Union League Club determined to do something ; to pay more attention to their own and to other people's politics. They were already united with each other, and they were eager to unite with you. But you refused to unite. They brought our greatest man to the front, and you were so poor as not to do him reverence. You had been asked to take the chief part in celebrating the birthday of Washington ; to induce a revival of patriotism by emphasizing the observance of Washington's birthday. The very *menu* of your banquet was inscribed with Washington's wisdom and statesmanship. You never so much as mentioned him. You never referred to him, except in a parenthesis of a paragraph devoted to an English duke. You may well indulge lament, and it will be a long lament, over our lack of great men, if Washington is not great enough to inspire you with one uplifting word, aglow with his courage, his wisdom, and his patriotism. It may even be that you will follow in the path pointed out by your English compeer, General my Lord Wolseley, and presently place in your empty niche of greatness the rebel Lee as the hero of the nineteenth century.

When the question was of great men, telling the truth, displaying courage, you ambled off into a superficial and fragmentary investigation of the stale old question as to whether Shakespeare was written by Shakespeare or by another man of the same name.

The portières and tapestries of the hall had been removed to make place for the flag of our country, and that nothing might be wanting to the lofty inspiration of the occasion, even the daffodils and Jacqueminots breathed the noble sentiment, "In proportion as the structure of a government gives force to public opinion, it is essential that public opinion should be enlightened." You responded by throwing no light, but rather darkness visible on the unimportant authorship of an insignificant character, whose only claim upon modern attention is that four centuries ago he sat for two bloody years upon the English throne. Is this the point upon which "we educated men" suppose the Chicago Club, in the spirit of Washington's Farewell Address, desire to enlighten public opinion ?

You claim loftily to be a man of letters, but you have not learned the alphabet of Americanism if you think the purpose of cherish-

ing and stimulating a more exalted patriotism in the hearts of the American people on the day which of all days signifies the birth, the growth, and the genius of our institutions is to be subverted by your scrambling behind Robin Hood's barn and amusing yourself with shooting a few play-arrows at a home-made target, four hundred years off, on the other side of the ocean.

If anything could reconcile us to your ignoble back-down at Music Hall it would be the political addresses which you were forced to stand and deliver at the banquets. It must have required something like nerve to enable you to confront the strong, impatient common sense of a Western audience with your complacent saws and your flat contradictions. Your amazing unconsciousness of the latter even spread a certain quaint grotesque flavor over the dreariness of the former.

It must have been something akin to courage which permitted you who had so ignominiously dropped the laboring oar, to address the gentlemen of the Club who had taken their magnificent pains to inaugurate a revival of exalted patriotism—"Now, gentlemen, *you* may be as indifferent as you like, but *I* say" thus and thus. Was it a mental obscuration so complete as to be indistinguishable from courage, that suffered you to lay down as a novel and self-evident proposition "that we ought in this country to be choice in our leaders; that here, more than anywhere else, especially in the chief place in this Nation, it is the man who makes the place, and not the place that makes the man?" Thinking it over afterwards, in the calm seclusion of Harvard, do you consider it a brilliant illustration of the good to be accomplished by the irruption of "us educated men" into politics that you have put a Sheriff, without collegiate, or political, or social education, into the chief place in the Nation, to make it after his own Buffalo fashion? You conceive of a higher plane of politics than "a matter of practical business"—"a kind of politics which studies the laws of cause and effect, and gradually formulates certain laws by which its judgment is guided;" and this you call "statesmanship." And the President of your "educated" choice practices statesmanship by sitting at his desk fourteen hours a day writing away for dear life, like the veriest clerk, evidently under the impression that he was made President by the Pharisees in order to do the work of a Scribe.

You discovered that "the city of Boston has joined the ring

of American cities, and has a governing board which enriches itself by utilizing the offices of government." Did you say this when you were banqueting at the Boston board? That would have been the place to say it, rather than the banquet of the Chicago Club, a thousand miles away—not the safer place, perhaps, but the bolder and more effective place. You think that reform of or within the old parties is hopeless, and you do not wish to form a new party. You only desire that "good men and sensible men and honest men shall act together on certain points." What is that but a party? Any number of men acting together on certain points is a party. This party of good, sensible, honest men is called the Democratic party, or the Republican party, according to the person speaking. A man must flock all by himself if he wants to stay outside of party. You take a leaf from Mr. Parnell's book, but you read it upside down. Mr. Parnell is perhaps the strongest party man on this earth. He holds a dictation more rigid than any American leader would venture to apply, and the cause of Ireland is strong because he holds it.

You are inclined to make it a reproach to your country that the population of the Colonies, at the time of our Revolution, was on the whole better educated in the principles of English liberty than their descendants of to-day. Undoubtedly they were, and it was because our Colonial ancestors were so well educated in the principles of English liberty that they would have none of it. The English liberty to which they were treated is fully summed up in the Declaration of Independence—a document which, even to this day, is regarded in England as an atrocious insult to the Crown. It may be that you also regard it as one of those rash, outspoken arraignments which the educated taste of the Harvard of to-day should condemn. But an English liberty which imposed taxes without consent of the taxed, which quartered soldiers in private houses in time of peace, which dissolved representative assemblies that proclaimed liberal principles, which deprived the people of the right to elect legislatures, which constantly obstructed the administration of justice, and made trial by jury a farce or a mere form of subservient obedience to autocratic authority, is an English liberty of which our Colonial forefathers learned altogether too much. If you choose that type of English liberty, instead of the broad American liberty whereunto you were born, I am ready to believe what I have hitherto refused

to believe, that on your way from Madrid to London, to assume the English Mission, you gleefully recalled with special gratification the fact that an ancestor of yours fought on the Royal side at Bunker Hill. I can believe what many of your countrymen have refused to believe, that more than once in Tory houses in England you have referred to this fact as matter of family pride. No one would restrain your right of free speech, or your free enjoyment of your ancestors, but you would have been a truer representative of your country if you had avowed this source of your family pride in America, to your own government, before you were appointed to the English Mission ; since in that case you would have been unanimously chosen to represent your cherished ancestral tombstone in the quiet shades of Harvard.

Your idea of our Civil Service long ago passed the stage of analysis or argument, and merits now only to be dismissed—if ever the slang of your English may cross the threshold of a decent periodical,—as “beastly rot.” What else is your discovery, on your return to your own country,—that “the one, and only one, source of all the ills is the condition of our Civil Service ;” that “the evil in Spain was a civil service precisely like our own,” which in Spain had gone so far as to “keep the people ready for revolution at any moment ?” Are our people ready, or getting ready, or developing a tendency to get ready for revolution at any moment ? In what respect was the civil service of Spain precisely like our own ? Was it in collecting and disbursing the revenues of the country with scrupulous fidelity ? Was it in the *personnel* of the Civil Service—a class of men averaging as high for integrity and intelligence as any profession or occupation in this country or in any country ? You say the notion is spreading that every man who has a share in the government of the country ought to have a share in its funds. Spreading where ? I have had a wide acquaintance in this country, and, beyond the salaries of officials, which are sometimes niggardly, and never generous, except perhaps in the highest office, the Presidency, I have not heard that sentiment so much as breathed. Designate any man or club, inside or outside our Civil Service, that ever publicly or privately uttered such a sentiment, or anything which could be construed into such a motive of action ; or that was ever known to act on such a sentiment without incurring the contumely of disgrace or the penalty of crime. If this robber-theory of our government is spreading anywhere,

it must be spreading where you have lived so long—in England. And it is spreading there, not by reason of any dishonesty or incompetency of our Civil Service, but because the faction of dissatisfaction to which you belong has never ceased its endeavor to build itself up by groundless and reckless slander of our common country.

As a consequence of our defective Civil Service, you maintain, other countries are better represented in their Parliaments than we. What countries? Is Ireland one—fighting tooth and nail for a hundred years, with famine and woe, with torch and bullet, and at last, and successfully, with rigid self-discipline and every device of Parliamentary skill and Constitutional right, for any representation at all? Is Scotland better represented, that cannot build a railroad at Inverary without asking permission at London? Is England one of these countries? You certainly cannot mean that other countries are more equitably represented, for, as we give in our House of Commons a representation based impartially on the number of people, we present a fairness in that regard unknown in any other country. If you mean that we do not send as able men to the American Congress as are sent to European Parliaments, that would resolve itself into an odious comparison—one in regard to which your own career has placed a disability upon you as judge. We are not familiar in this country with Continental Parliaments, knowing only the towering personalities like Bismarck in Germany, Cavour in Italy, Gambetta in France; but if you seek a comparison in England, and confine it to the half century since you left Harvard, certainly the United States would not suffer. The era of Clay, Webster, Calhoun, and Benton; the era of Douglas, Seward, Sumner, and Fessenden; the era of Blaine, Hoar, Thurman, Sherman, Carlisle, and Conkling,—will certainly compare favorably with the corresponding era of the British Parliament. Where has the United States intrusted leading positions in the House to such men as Hicks-Beach, Arthur Balfour, and W. H. Smith? You are probably viewing the Congressmen chosen by the people in the light of your own little shy at selecting a popular representative for the head of the Nation; but you will do well to remember the Prince's rejoinder when the tailor complained that the company was not sufficiently exclusive—"Does he expect it to be all tailors?"

With your invincible genius for unconscious contradiction and

self-portrayal, you admit that "the worst part of the corruption of our Civil Service is that office is a reward for political service of any kind," with the result that "when a man has got experience we put another man in his place!" This maudlin stuff long ago fell below the level of argument, fortunately for both of "us educated men," since in point of this argument between you and me, honors will be easy. As your office was given you unquestionably in reward for political service, you hold the ace; but since the same corruption put another man in your place, your country as unquestionably takes the trick.

Mr. Lowell, when in the decisive moment you decided for the evil side, you seem to have lost your power of distinguishing good from evil. Your high political morality exhausts itself in sounding words. You declaim of courage; then throw your musket over your shoulder and run. You denounce corruption, yourself milked all over with its fungi,—if corruption is, as you say, rewarding political service with office. You pause, out of breath with your swift rush from the defeated to the winning side, only long enough to condemn "the practical politician" for being "first on one side of the question and then turning suddenly to the other." You deplore our lack of greatness, and with all your strength you celebrate littleness. You summon "us educated men" to politics, and you show a solid political ignorance to the square inch, that, volatilized, would envelop the world in haze. While you have been dining and wining in England, you have lost the run of the United States. You stand outside, not only of party, but of that strong, subtle, mysterious current which is the soul of our real politics. Should we send our best to the convention of 1888, if it were to be held now, you ask, and looking around upon your Harvard Alumni,—you answer by implication, No;—and no doubt correctly for your part of Harvard, which would strike as it struck before on the level of an ex-sheriff and a creature of accident,—the "wooden idol" whom you bear aloft on your shoulders with the shrill outcry, "These be thy Gods, O, Israel!" But the West, for whom in Chicago you profess a livelier hope than for your own Massachusetts, the West from whose greater force and freshness, and vitality, and Americanism you gather trust for the future; this great West of the keener insight and the stronger courage, is the same West, that, while you were dallying and shilly-shallying, bewailing our lack of great men and dropping finally

into the grasp of small men,—has built itself up year after year, in convention after convention, against your opposition and the opposition of all the sham and shoddy of your party ; built itself up, not of men who acted with it in convention, and acted against it outside of convention, but built itself up steadfastly like a well of adamant round that which is best and broadest in your cause ; made a stand for Americanism in its widest commercial sweep, in its loftiest attitude of continental dignity, in its ultimate purpose of the freedom, the happiness, the elevation of every human being.

You announce that you have arrived at a time of life when you may fairly hang up your armor in the Temple of Janus. As you like. Your partiality to hanging cannot be more harmlessly indulged. But you must not stand in the doorway of the temple, and fire random shots, poisoned bullets, at your countrymen outside, who are still fighting in the thick of the battle.

“ But if anybody touches my shield,” you say, “ possibly I may answer.”

I await your answer, with the eager desire that you may yet show yourself to be what your countrymen would most gladly believe you—a Knight without fear and without reproach.

ARTHUR RICHMOND.